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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Association pour la défense des droits de l'homme et des revendications démocratiques/ culturelles du peuple Azerbaïdjanais-Iran - «ARC» a non- governmental organizations in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[7 February 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



## **Evaluation of Impacts of Climate Change on Minority Nations in Iran (Islamic Republic of)**

This is a Statement by Arc Association for the Defence of Human Rights of Azerbaijanis of Iran (ArcDH) to the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) on protecting human rights in the context of climate change concerning Azerbaijanis in the Azerbaijani provinces and other minority nations and groups in Iran (Islamic Republic of). It provides evidence that the impending impacts on the Azerbaijani provinces in Iran are mishandled by inept Iranian authorities and thereby their futures are put at risk. The situation also applied to the other minority nations in Iran (Islamic Republic of).

### **International Drivers Promoted by the UN**

The driver for the Statement by ArcDH is Resolution 48/14, which provides Mandate for the newly created Especial Rapporteur on *the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Context of Climate Change*. Also, Sustainable Development Goal 13 (SDG13) is relevant to the Statement, and we are conversant with Third National Communication to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by Iran (Islamic Republic of).<sup>1</sup>

### **The Approach by Iran (Islamic Republic of)**

Iran (Islamic Republic of) pledged to undersign the 2030 Agenda in December 2016. It was approved by the Iranian Majlis on 13 June 2017 but required the Islamic Shariah to prevail should there be any conflict with Agenda 2030. Although the pledge was withdrawn on 13 September 2021,<sup>2</sup> and surprisingly there were no significant protests from government officials or from Members of the Iranian Majlis! Owing to the massive scale of environmental problems in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and the recent withdrawal from the 2030 Agenda, the past activities by Iranian officials were seen as empty gestures. This was a disappointment to minority nations in Iran (Islamic Republic of).

The UN drive towards sustainable development in 1992 coincided with the post-war period in Iran (Islamic Republic of), which participated in various conferences but there were very few activities to adopt sustainable development through legislation. Policymaking and planning are instruments of legitimacy for any new activities and in relation to the environment and sustainability, the milestones in Iran (Islamic Republic of) are insignificant and comprise:

- Article 50 of the Iranian Constitution alludes to the environment in rather vague terms, according to which the protection of the environment is considered a public duty and requires present and future generations to play a growing social role.
- The Iranian Department of the Environment (DoE) became more active since the 1990s, after the Iran (Islamic Republic of)-Iraq War (1980-88). DoE is a governmental agency overseen by the president. One of its missions was to put in place and bring into force the practice of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) but based on existing situations, this may be regarded as an unsuccessful mission.
- After the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the DoE set up the National Committee on Sustainable Development (NCSD) in 1993, and now have provincial deputies but with unclear mandates.
- DoE developed 26 national environmental sustainability indicators through the NCSD, in cooperation with some ministries and governmental organisations, within five categories and 13 sub-categories related to climate (climate change and air quality), water, land, etc.
- The targets pledged by the Iranian government lacked short-term deliverables but outlined only targets beyond 2020. Iran (Islamic Republic of) pledged a 4% cut in emissions by 2030 relative to business as usual or a 12% cut conditioned on international support of \$35bn, and both conditioned on an end to sanctions<sup>3</sup>. Climate

change mitigation and adaptation is primarily governed by the National Climate Change Office, which is a part of the DoE<sup>4</sup>. The literature reflects on climate change being taken up at the top of Iran (Islamic Republic of)'s leadership (e.g., the 15-points list<sup>5</sup> expressed by Khamenei, to serve environmental policy directives, intriguingly emerged just before the 2015 Paris Agreement<sup>6</sup>), but we argue that these are political gestures and yet to prove to be genuine policymakers for mitigating climate change.

- The Law of the Protection of the Environment was drafted in July 2015, passed in 2017, and approved by the Guardian Council in 2017<sup>7</sup> and a few more, such as the clean air act but these are few and far in between.

## **Overview of Impacts of Climate Change on Azerbaijani Provinces in Iran (Islamic Republic of)**

As may be seen from the above, there is not much solid ground in Iran (Islamic Republic of) to protect the environment and that for minority nations and most of the minority groupings are simply non-existent.

Climate change was used as an excuse in Iran (Islamic Republic of) to justify the drying of Lake Urmia. When Azerbaijanis staged at least three waves of protests in 2010-2012, literally hundreds were arrested and imprisoned. The Iranian authorities organised the Urmia Lake Restoration National Committee (ULRNC) to restore the lake with foreign countries donating to its restoration but this turned out to be an empty gesture. After the election of the current president, ULRNC was abolished. This is the situation with the minority nations and evidently, they have no protection.

Resolution 48/14 reaffirms that States like Iran (Islamic Republic of) are obliged with the primary responsibility to human rights and its supporting resolutions including those on economic, social, cultural and political human rights instruments. These all have bearings on the minority nations and we bear a witness that any signs of fulfilling these obligations are yet to be seen.

We have checked relevant internationally published information and confirm that the average annual increase in the Azerbaijani provinces is just more than 1.5°C and in other parts of Iran (Islamic Republic of) this can be more but below 2 °C (but it is below 1.5°C in some of the coastal regions. Therefore, preliminary impacts of climate change are expected but the remaining deteriorations should be attributed to inept management. Inept management is clearly visible in terms of GHGs emissions.

Evidently, Azerbaijanis in the Azerbaijani provinces in Iran (Islamic Republic of) are vulnerable with respect to climate change, and visibly impacted concerning their economic, social, cultural and environmental consequences. We are concerned that there is no mitigatory measure within our sight being implemented by the Iranian authorities to prevent or minimize the causes of climate change and the impacts on Azerbaijani women, children, persons with disabilities, its ethnic minorities and local communities, are yet to be assessed by the Iranian authorities.

We bear witness that Azerbaijani human rights defenders and environmental activists are prosecuted by the Iranian authorities, and therefore it is difficult to collect objective data or information from the natural environment in the Azerbaijani provinces.

We confirm that year on year, the living conditions in the Azerbaijani provinces are becoming harsher due to inept management of the Iranian authorities and they no longer can count on the safety and cleanness of their environment, as the air is polluted, groundwater is polluted and being depleted fast. We very much hope that the new Especial Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Context of Climate Change will not lose the focus on minority nations and any other minority categories including those on the nation of Azerbaijan in the Azerbaijani provinces in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and other minority nations and groups in Iran (Islamic Republic of).

## Concluding Remarks

Any awareness of the obligations of Iran (Islamic Republic of) on creating a just climate for fighting climate change has not yet materialised and the very little contributed by the representative of Iran (Islamic Republic of) in COP26 did not satisfy anyone. Perhaps, their participation signalled that they may be engaged with the UN leadership on this vital issue. The Statement produces some evidence that there is ground for the environmental racism in Iran (Islamic Republic of), as the Azerbaijani provinces suffer disproportionately from it due to the forced drying of Lake Urmia and depletion of its aquifers. The poor governance in Iran evidently impacts on Azerbaijani natural resources, its long-standing patterns of poverty and inequalities, its deterioration of access to basic services, and already much higher rates of youth unemployment inflicting Azerbaijanis to be internally displaced people in Iran (Islamic Republic of). The discrimination impacts against Azerbaijani women is yet to be understood but is visible.

Resolution 48/14 is the last source of hope for Azerbaijanis in the Azerbaijani provinces in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and for other minority nations, as well as other minority categories. The resolution recalls Article 5 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which stresses on human rights being universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and calls on the international community to treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner. This should make Azerbaijanis in the Azerbaijani provinces and other categories of minority in Iran (Islamic Republic of) hopeful to find a voice, when the problems get hard in the near future.

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1. <https://unfccc.int/documents/1814>
  2. <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-ban-unesco-educational-documents-raeisi/31458072.html>
  3. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/the-carbon-brief-profile-iran>
  4. Department of Environment Iran (Islamic Republic of) (doe.ir)
  5. <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/2497/Expand-green-economy-administer-justice-and-raise-awareness>
  6. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-the-final-paris-climate-deal>
  7. <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2017-07-10/iran-law-to-protect-wetlands/>
  8. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/mapped-how-every-part-of-the-world-has-warmed-and-could-continue-to-warm>